R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 020 987 UD 005 923

NEW ROAD FOR YOUNG MIGRANTS.

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PUB DATE MAR 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.28 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- *DROPOUT PROGRAMS, *CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS, *MIGRANT YOUTH, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, YOUNG ADULTS, NEGROES, SPEECH IMPROVEMENT, MIDDLE CLASS VALUES, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, FEDERAL PROGRAMS, RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS, COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT, HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM, SOUTH FLORIDA UNIVERSITY, TAMPA, FLORIDA

THE FEDERALLY-FINANCED HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA AT TAMPA PROVIDES A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION TO DROPOUTS FROM MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARMWORKER FAMILIES. APPLICANTS MUST BE FROM POVERTY FAMILIES AND BETWEEN THE AGES OF 17 AND 22. CURRENTLY, THE TAMPA PROGRAM HAS 48 STUDENTS, MOST OF WHOM ARE NEGROES. STUDENTS LIVE ON CAMPUS, ARE GIVEN $10 WEEKLY FOR EXPENSES, AND RECEIVE TWO ROUND-TRIP TICKETS TO THEIR HOMES. PROGRAM PERSONNEL PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE TEST WHICH GIVES THEM A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AND PROVIDES AID TO THOSE WHO PASS IN PLANNING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION. ONE IMPORTANT FEATURE OF THE PROGRAM IS SPEECH TRAINING, IN WHICH STANDARD ENGLISH IS TAUGHT AS A SECOND LANGUAGE. THE PROGRAM ATTEMPTS TO PREPARE THESE DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS TO MOVE INTO THE MIDDLE-CLASS CULTURE. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 3, NUMBER 7, MARCH 1968. (NH)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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NEW ROAD FOR YOUNG MIGRANTS

By Bette Orsini

Tucked away in a set of converted motel apartments out of the campus mainstream at the University of South Florida in Tampa is a federally funded antipoverty effort to polish teen-age migrant laborers for entry into the affluent society.

Next door is the plush high-rise private dormitory hall that turned the migrants out, says the project director, when it was learned what type of students they were to be. Across the street—a chasm away—gleams the shiny convertible, sleek-hairdo, sorority-house and stereo-set middle class to which the 48 migrant students aspire.

Whether they will be able to navigate the gorge is the question at the core of HEP, the federal government's nationwide, 11-project High School Equivalency Program. HEP is in its first year of tryout throughout the nation. Two programs opened in June; the other nine in September. Tuskegee Institute has the only other HEP in the Southeast.

The quality of the project varies with the campus but the central idea, set out by the U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity, is to give the high-school dropout from a migrant and seasonal farmworker background a passport out of poverty.

To qualify, the migrant has to be part of the 17-to-22 age group in a poverty-level family and must have failed to complete the equivalent of a high-school education. The emphasis apparently is on the "equivalent" because some of the migrants at Tampa tell of having finished high school or of dropping out to attend the program.

HEP is funded for 550 students in its 11 programs

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that seek to arm students across the country with a quick high-school diploma and a set of skills they can use to get a good job.

The Tampa HEP, financed by a $200,000 federal grant, is heavily Florida-flavored, with 29 of its four dozen students listed as Floridians, but it draws from eight southeastern states in all. Most of the 48 are Negro and the 12 who aren't are either Spanish-speaking or from rural Florida backgrounds. They are about equally divided between boys and girls.

The migrants live, makeshift, in the University Apartments, made available by the University of South Florida Foundation when the original housing arrangements fell through. Students are given $10 a week to buy clothes and tooth paste and whatever else they need, and two round-trip tickets home.

With the staff, an unofficial gauge of the program's success is how many of the migrants check back in after a holiday visit home. The program's tutor-counselors from the university student body—they are called "TC's" aboard the program—anxiously tick off returning migrants like a mother hen checking in her brood.

In class, the HEP students are briefed by a four-teacher staff to prepare them for the General Educational Development (GED) test that will give them their high-school equivalency diploma, and they also are put through a course in speech. They are exposed to typing and business machines courses and to extra-curricular activities.

The first tests produced reading levels from second grade to college, though all the migrants have completed at least seventh grade. Most have marked gaps in language and mathematics. Some in the top group came relatively well equipped; a dozen already have passed the GED test.

Those who made it on the first go-round now get help with plans for where they want to go from here: college, junior college, technical training, job training or right onto a job. To help them with the decision, prevocational training provides trips to industrial plants and visiting lecturers from specific occupations.

The project hasn't been able to deliver on some of the advantages it promised in proposals submitted to federal antipoverty officials.

The statement of purpose laid heavy emphasis on a "total residential approach" needed to lift the culturally disadvantaged out of poverty and on proposed model living arrangements for students to expose them to the possibilities of a better life. But the 12-story university-supervised private residence hall proposed in the project, with separate controlled floors, independent stairways and elevators for men and women, ground-floor recreation room, modern dining hall, air-conditioned suites, spacious and attractive living and study areas, is unlike the quarters where the program is housed.

The South Florida program is costing more than $4,000 per student for the year. The proposal requested $354,237, roughly $7,000 per student a year to do the job, but the Office of Economic Opportunity allowed $206,427, slightly more than $4,128 per student. Dr. Juanita Williams, the trim, blonde Mississippi-born Ph.D. psychologist who directs the program, says the operation is hampered by its tight budget.

An Upward Bound project to upgrade promising high-school poor children is operated out of the same office, and the university once ran a poverty project to train adult migrants to work as teacher aides. When the High School Equivalency and Upward Bound projects were proposed, Dr. Williams and a colleague, journalism graduate Marijo K. McCormick, who holds a master's degree in personnel services, were listed as co-directors for each other's programs. But in practice, says Mrs. Williams, she directs HEP and Mrs. McCormick directs Upward Bound.

Elsewhere in Florida, Florida Presbyterian College in St. Petersburg operates an Upward Bound program hailed as one of the best in the nation; the University of Miami has trained national Teacher Corps candidates and Head Start staff; and other public and

The motel-like University Apartments (foreground) contrast with the 12-story residence hall originally proposed to house the migrants.

private colleges are assisting Community Action Program agencies in specific antipoverty efforts, with migrants and other poor.

Florida's migrant and seasonal agricultural worker concentration is heavy in southern east coast and central west coast counties. HEP project directors travel to target counties to recruit trainees, and state school officials have agreed to notify school staffs about the program. Much of the recruiting has been done by the OEO's antipoverty community action agencies.

As its academic approach, the project proposes "a remedial therapy educational program to motivate the student to develop and utilize his own resources in the learning process." This includes diagnosis of deficiencies, individual and group instruction, programmed laboratory work and counseling on adjustment to society.

The proposal anticipated placing the programmed laboratory in the living area near the students to insure maximum use, and one of the motel apartments was converted to house it. But the lab was moved back to the campus later and the apartment pressed into service as one of the HEP classrooms.

Students who need extra help with studies are assigned to tutor-counselors for evening work. Since one of the major goals of the program is to prepare the migrants to pass the GED tests, the curriculum is geared to that purpose, covering reading, English, social studies, mathematics and science.

Speech classes are helping the migrants correct their speaking faults, and a nonacademic program is trying to produce competence in at least two sports such as swimming and tennis, training in personal hygiene, etiquette and grooming, and exposure to cultural events, museums and recreational activities on monthly field trips.

Students have access to the campus library, the weekly university dances and the student leisure hub, the University Center. They have three classrooms allotted to them on campus and take their meals in the campus cafeteria. They get medical examinations, attend a lecture and film series, and their parents are invited to the campus for visits.

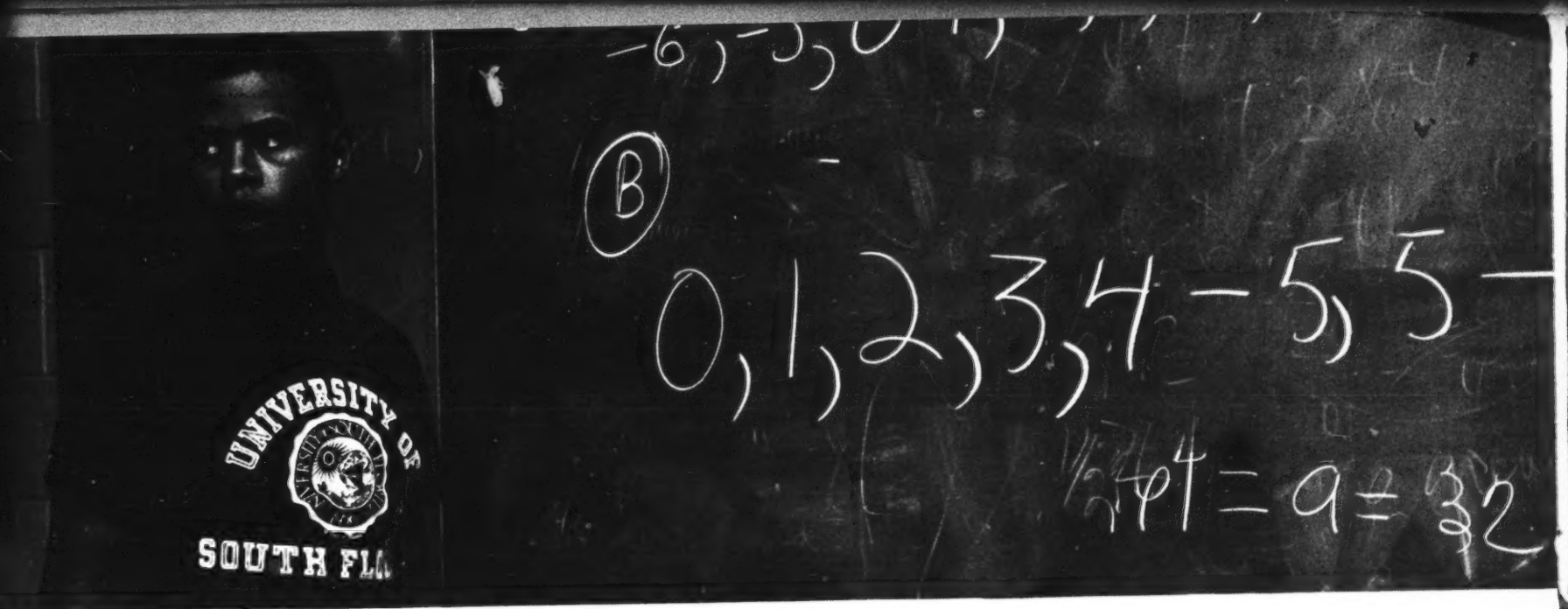
In the living quarters, the proposal promised each student a living-study area containing a large desk-dresser, a bed, and a vanity with lavatory and closet. In the substituted two-bedroom motel apartments, the project has had to move in bunks to accommodate five girls in some suites instead of the planned four. Stoves and refrigerators have been pulled out of kitchens to make space for study areas.

The living room in one apartment is a television room for the 48 students and an unfurnished bedroom is the game room. In one vacant bedroom, campus volunteers have set up a thrift shop where the migrants may buy clothing for 25 cents to $1.50 to supplement meager wardrobes. A collection of paperback books has been assembled for a dorm "library."

Wives of some of the university faculty have become interested in the project and invited the migrant girls to their homes for sociables to learn flower arranging and other graces. When a campus formal dance was coming up, the women got the word out and rounded up donations of after-5 dresses from faculty closets for the trainees.

Mrs. Williams, directing her first program, contends the project must be flexible. "You can't go in with a rigid notion of how you think it will be. If you do you'll get panic-stricken," she said. "We started classes and since then the problems appear day by day."

She considers speech training essential for disadvantaged students. The project teaches them standard English as a second language. "If they speak with this Southern Negro dialect they're not going to get very far," said Mrs. Williams. "We're very blunt about this. We tell them they need to learn how to modify their speech so when they go to get a job they can be



understood. It's almost like being able to switch it on and off. When they go back home they can revert to the dialect. We want them to be accepted at home."

The director hopes in the second quarter to tie vocational courses into the program. "We have no funds in the budget but we're considering a tie-in with the public-school system."

Grappling for her first time with the problems of dropping a group of migrant farm-labor students onto a college campus, Mrs. Williams said, "I'm having to define these things for myself before I can do them. I hadn't ever really been confronted with the problems that are appearing. But believe me, when you take a sample of the culture, displace it and relocate it into a vastly different culture, the differences become very sharp; you can see them very clearly and they present problems."

Even within the migrant group she traces marked disparities in behavior and values among the three ethnic groups involved. "They're much less inhibited in their expression and they act out their feelings much more readily than we're accustomed to in dealing with white, middle-class college students," the doctor noted.

The noise level has been a thorn. The project had to ban portable radios in classrooms because blaring music in the hall during class breaks produced complaints from members of the university staff in the faculty office-classroom building.

"If these youngsters get angry with one another, they're much more likely to resort to violence as a solution to problems," Mrs. Williams told an interviewer. "It begins as some kind of argument, which gets louder and louder and sometimes ends in assault. There've only been two incidents but they've been pretty scary and there have been other times when the thing has been averted. Both episodes were between a boy and a girl."

The director told of the difficulty the migrants have in "grasping the idea that you can talk about your problems and come to a solution on a verbal level. Their culture does not have the vocabulary to express feelings. When they get to the point of total verbal frustration and can't say what their feelings are they become physical—and that point comes pretty quick," she observed.

After one altercation outside a classroom, Mrs. Williams called a general assembly for behavior briefing on "how vulnerable we are." The students, she recalled, met her arguments with disbelief, one inquiring, "Do you mean if we get into it and Barbara shoves me, I'm not to hit her back?" The director fielded the question by asking how it would look "if your counselor and I got into an argument, she slapped me and I pulled a knife."

"We tell them that if they're going to negotiate the system and move into the middle-class culture, then they've got to learn the behavior that's associated with that culture and conform to it," Mrs. Williams said. She put it this way:

"Without making any judgment about what's good and what's bad, if you aspire to move in this society you've got to learn the rules of the game, and one of the rules is that if you have differences you find solutions without mutilating each other. This has been the biggest problem with having a program like this on a college campus. We tell the students that if they become too difficult the host agent is going to reject them."

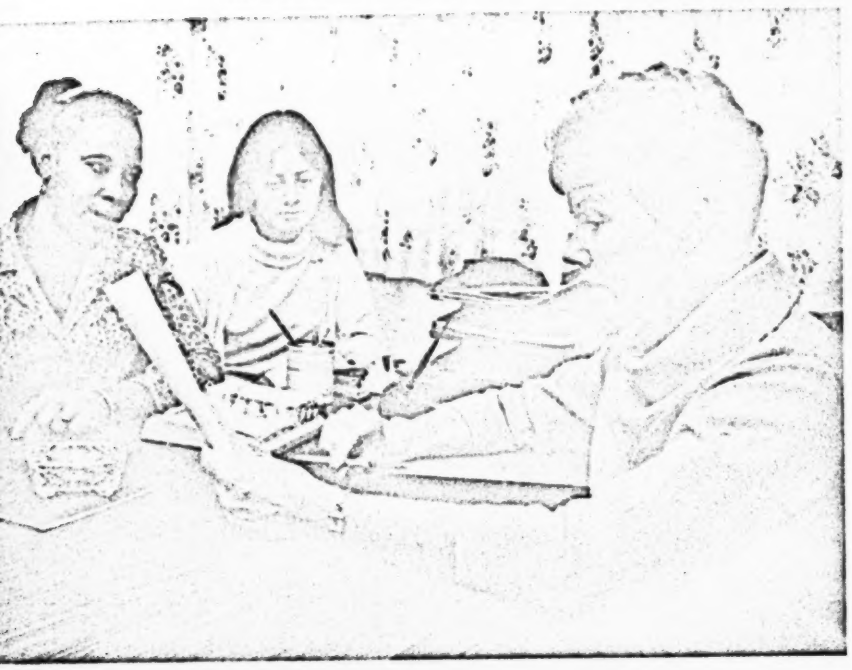
Trained in clinical psychology at Temple University, the good-looking, 45-year-old mother of four added: "You have to say to them just cool it because otherwise we're going to be kicked out. But that isn't enough. You've got to teach them that it's important to know what the values of this other culture are."

Fascinated by the "theoretical questions" the program poses, Mrs. Williams sketched it as a living laboratory where can be watched the impact of the two cultures and the resulting changes of attitude. The staff says changes already have taken place. They dress better, handle makeup and hair styles more acceptably and the TC's say "they knock on your door now whereas they used to pound."

Said Mrs. Williams: "Physically they're blending into the college campus where in the beginning they didn't. You could spot one of them a mile off and know that he wasn't a college student."

Some professors have become interested in the project and arranged exchange panels with their stu-

Mrs. Juanita Williams, HEP director, talks with students.



dents and the migrants. Where the trainees shine is in their singing and dancing. Invited to a college dance, one HEPster held forth for an hour with a microphone singing, to the delight of the regular students, and the way the TC's tell it, nobody on campus can match the migrants' way with the psychedelic dances.

"I would say the acceptance of our students on campus has been better than expected," the director observed.

The migrants are friendly and eager to talk to a stranger. Student government president Judy Pierce, a 17-year-old from Fort Myers, says it feels great to hold office: "Like—you know—respected."

Judy was making A's and C's at Dunbar High but dropped out, she said, to come to the program because "I would have had two more years to go but here I can get out in three months." The major difference from Dunbar is that "mostly you're on your own. You don't have your mother saying don't do this and that; you have the whole responsibility."

James Highberg, 19, was out of school supporting his family "because Daddy decided the farm was a bad deal, I reckon, and went back home to Texas." Jim had been working in a housing development dynamite crew and "I had me a pretty good name out there too."

How is HEP different from regular school? "Little more crowded is all I can see," Highberg said. "The school in Okeechobee was awfully crowded but here it's all crowded into that one room. At least down there you got to run all over the building when we changed class." But Jim thinks he has learned more because he is pushed more. "In Okeechobee they didn't care whether you got your homework or not."

Some of the migrants count it "lonely and hard to get to know people." "You walk down the sidewalk and say hi and they look at you like you're crazy," said one.

Another youngster named Jim and his brother John, 17, with stubble beard and shirt laced at the neck with leather thongs, found their way into the program through a school teacher who "talked to our sister about us being out of school." Others, like Ruben Lopez, 17, were reached somewhere along the migrant stream by persons who work with itinerant farm families. In Illinois, Ruben recalled, "this guy came to our house and started talking about wanting us to go to school. One day he came with some papers for the family to see if I wanted to go in the program."

Ruben had been a ninth-grader in a seven-child family that hoes sugar beets for a living. He had to continue his education, he said, "because my mother won't let me quit. I still have three more years to go but with this program it's three years into one. That's great. I'll take the program."

Andrew Robert Lee Boyd, 19, of Memphis, Tenn., stopped school in the eighth grade because he didn't have clothes or lunches. He rated the program about the same as regular school. "There's only one problem: in regular school you're just going to get an education but in this program you're getting paid. That's about the only difference I see in it."

Barbara Rountree, 21, whose mother and father are Bradenton grove pickers, said even though she's finished high school she's learning things she never knew before.

Tucked away in a set of converted motel apartments, with a vine-overgrown vacant lot between them and the university campus mainstream, are 48 migrants working toward skills that can help them cross to the other side.

Whether they'll make it is the question at the core of the poverty-breaking HEP effort at the University of South Florida. ○